

# SOLANO COUNTY GUIDANCE FOR RESPONDING TO COVID-19 AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

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This guidance outlines key actions that should be taken by local jurisdictions and homeless outreach services to protect people experiencing homelessness from the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations are adapted from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>) and Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease within Encampments ([Department of Housing and Urban Development](#))

## Partnerships

To prevent negative outcomes from lack of services, community leaders should continue activities that protect people experiencing homelessness, including supporting continuity of homeless services, healthcare, behavioral health services, food pantries, and linkages to permanent housing. Plans need to be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

- **Homeless outreach teams** need to be prepared to [protect themselves and their clients](#), provide health education information, and help direct their clients to care as necessary:
  - **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry
  - **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands, especially if in close contact with a person or contaminated surface
  - **Avoid close** contact with people who are sick
  - **Stay home** if you are sick
  - **Cover coughs & sneezes** with your elbow or tissue, rather than your hands
  - **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces often
- **Hospitals and healthcare facilities** should ensure that they are involved in planning the logistics for safely discharging COVID-19 patients to a designated location if they do not require hospitalization but lack housing.
- **Law enforcement** should be apprised of plans related to protecting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness from COVID-19 in order to best work in coordination with homelessness service systems and state and local health departments.
- **People experiencing homelessness themselves** are an important resource to help navigate their communities and keep their friends and family members safe. Consider developing an advisory board with representation from people experiencing homelessness to ensure plans are implementable in the community.

## Prevention Measures

### Encampments

- Unless individual housing units are available, do not clear encampments during community spread of COVID-19. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.
- Encourage people staying in encampments to set up their tents/sleeping quarters with at least 12 feet x 12 feet of space per individual.

- Ensure nearby restroom facilities have functional water taps, are stocked with hand hygiene materials (soap, drying materials) and bath tissue, and remain open to people experiencing homelessness 24 hours per day.
- If toilets or handwashing facilities are not available nearby, **provide access to portable latrines with handwashing facilities** for known encampments. All these facilities must be cleaned and sanitized at least once daily.
- Provide hand sanitizer and other hygiene products to encampment residents on a regular basis

### Communications

Provide straightforward communications to people sleeping outside in the appropriate language. Identify people who are influential in the community to help communicate with others. Post signs in strategic locations providing information on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. Request current contact information for each person.

Information to share includes:

- The most recent information about COVID-19 spread in their area
- Advice to avoid crowded areas if COVID-19 is circulating in their community
- Social distancing recommendations
- Hand hygiene instructions, cough etiquette instructions, and advice not to share personal items
- How to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if they are sick
- What to do if their friends, family, or community members are sick
- How to isolate themselves if they have symptoms
- Updated information on where to find food, water, hygiene facilities, regular healthcare, and behavioral health resources if there have been local closures or changes

### Homeless services outreach staff

When COVID-19 is spreading in your community, assign outreach staff who are at higher risk for severe illness to other duties. Advise outreach staff who will be continuing outreach activities on how to protect themselves and their clients from COVID-19 in the course of their normal duties. Instruct staff to:

- Screen clients for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 by asking them if they have a fever, new or worsening cough, or shortness of breath.
- If the client has a cough, immediately provide them with a surgical mask to wear.
- If urgent medical attention is necessary, use standard outreach protocols to facilitate access to healthcare.
- Wear gloves if you need to handle client belongings. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer (>60% alcohol) before and after wearing gloves.
- Street medicine and healthcare worker outreach staff should review and follow recommendations for [healthcare workers](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>)
- Review [stress and coping resources](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html) for yourselves and your clients during this time. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- HomeBase resources to support homeless service providers and systems respond to COVID-19: <https://www.homebaseccc.org/covid-19-response?siteRevision=659>

Questions can be directed to [COVID19@SolanoCounty.com](mailto:COVID19@SolanoCounty.com)